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DE RUEHCV #2286/01 2151422
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 031422Z AUG 06
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5695
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6851
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5676
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1368
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 2235
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0483
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1382
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3932
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2320
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0954
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3673
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0928
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0567
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0409
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0895
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 002286

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/15/2016

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SUBJECT: NO SURPRISE ON CNE'S CAMPAIGN ADVERTISING AND
PUBLICITY RULES

REF: CARACAS 001662

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Classified By: ACTING DCM ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR REASON 1.4 (D)

Summary

¶1. (C) The National Electoral Council announced on July 31 the regulations that will govern campaign publicity and advertising for during the presidential campaign period. The new regulations do not limit Chavez's weekly Alo Presidente television address, nor will they restrict his use of "cadenas nacionales," which pre-empt normal broadcasts, despite opposition requests to the contrary. The CNE's decision is additional evidence that it will follow the practices of its predecessor. There seems to be little hope for real improvement in electoral conditions prior to the December presidential elections. End Summary.

CAMPAIGN RULES APPROVED

¶2. (C) National Electoral Council (CNE) President Tibisay Lucena announced on July 31 the regulations that will govern campaign publicity and advertising for both government officials and opposition candidates during the presidential campaign period, which started August 1 and runs through December 1. Only one member of the pro-Chavez electoral board voted against the advertising regulations, and Lucena indicated the CNE would present the full, and presumably final, set of campaign rules by August 5.

¶3. (C) The regulations stipulate that candidates, political

organizations, and voting groups can contract with regional and national public television service providers for a maximum of two minutes per day, two minutes per day with private television providers, and, in radio, up to four minutes daily. The CNE will also provide each group up to six minutes of its allotted time for a national cadena on radio and television. The same groups can obtain up to half a page daily in standard-sized newspapers and up to a full page in a magazine-sized publication. The regulations also prohibit campaigning outside of the designated campaign period and any efforts to discourage voters from participating in the election. Lucena indicated that compliance with the norms will be monitored by 78 electoral overseers, two per state and 18 at the national level, and failure to adhere to the failure will result in fines.

CHALK ONE UP FOR CHAVEZ

¶4. (C) The new regulations do not limit Chavez,s weekly Alo Presidente television address, nor will they restrict his use of "cadenas nacionales," broadcasts local stations are required to carry, despite Lucena,s assurances that the regulations are targeted toward monitoring the behavior of government officials involved in the campaign. Lucena defended the decision by claiming that these broadcasts are part of Chavez,s work as President and not related to his presidential bid. Vicente Diaz, the only CNE director to vote against the regulations and the only pro-opposition member of the CNE board, had recommended that the programs be suspended, and Sumate last week criticized the then-proposed rules for not regulating the presidential broadcasts and thus giving Chavez the advantage of promoting his accomplishments using government resources.

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¶5. (C) Continued and unrestricted access to his weekly address and cadenas will be a potent campaign tool for Chavez. As reported in ref a, Chavez,s use of public and private broadcasting to tout his social programs and attack the opposition gives his campaign an unusual advantage, and he is currently on track this year to break his annual records for airtime spent "en cadena" and in Alo Presidente.

OPPOSITION RESPONSE

¶6. (C) The opposition has criticized the new regulations, claiming they do not level the electoral campaign playing field and clearly favor the government. Opposition presidential candidate Julio Borges said that the CNE's decision is evidence that the BRV is "afraid of losing the cadenas and Alo Presidente," while fellow opposition contender Teodoro Petkoff argued that it continues to allow Chavez to use government resources to run his campaign. Roberto Smith, yet another opposition presidential hopeful, proposed that, as a result of the decision, each candidate should have the right to a six hour program on Sundays, or have access to every public station.

COMMENT

¶7. (C) The CNE,s most recent decision is more evidence that it will continue the pro-government activities of with its predecessor. Once again, the single opposition CNE board member has been marginalized. As the CNE debates other campaign conditions and rules, such as finance regulations and the use of fingerprint machines, there seems to be little hope for real improvement in electoral conditions prior to the December presidential elections.
BROWNFIELD